# Media(ting) Textual Therapies in David Lodge's *Therapy* and *Deaf Sentence*

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**Abstract:** What the present article attempts at is mediating the image of a 'discarnate man' who inlays a discursive medium, itself a message. In so doing, it embarks upon two of David Lodge's novels, **Therapy** (1995) and **Deaf Sentence** (2008) respectively as best implying and suggesting for a mode of survival: the exorcising writing act, manifest at the level of the text under the form of diary pages, letters or emails, seems to work as the best therapeutic treatment for depression (personal or textual), so that the poetics of the text is gradually traded for and replaced by the politics of the fictional game.

**Keywords:** media(ted) communication; textual therapy; poetics of the text; politics of the text; plurality of fragmentation; textual selves

## 1. Last Things First

During the past decades of the post-modern era (the diversity of which makes it so problematic to define), Literature seems to have been involved in a tight competition with the Media which, despite the latest phenomenon of textual globalization intended to serve the purpose of communication, inevitably lead to people losing their interest in reading.

Literature is simultaneously a medium accessed on a second-hand basis, i.e. through audio, video or electronic versions, and a media(tic) expression. It is their very eclectic nature that allows for a(n) (inter)/(intra)play of opposites: Media and Literature – both fabricators of textual(ized) messages allow for a plurality of artful wor(l)ds (allowing its consumer to recognize the unique 'reality', i.e. the textuality of the text) indispensable to a mediatic (carnivalesque?!) post-modern society of consumption.

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The Media, which manifest themselves either under the form of a mass society (flooded by consumerisms) or under the form of media(ted) communication, seem to have filled the cultural market and, inescapably, to have gained their place in literature, especially in fiction. Such tendencies are best observable in the work of David Lodge, whether examples are taken from his fiction which can be said to belong to a particular kind of faction, or from his writing about fiction, i.e. literary theory and criticism.

The current article falls into four main sections (the introductory and conclusive part included) which touch upon the relationship of interconnectedness between that which is labelled as postmodern literature (submitted to a continuous process of writing and rewriting) and the postmodern society of consumption. Therein, by disclosing the current relationship between Literature, the Media and the society we live in, each of the sections included in the present paper is particularly constructed so as to gradually train and introduce readers into the textual(ising) worlds crafted by David Lodge where the poetics of plurality and fragmentation has been traded for a textual politics.

The current article brings to the fore a number of similarities that make **Therapy** (1995) and **Deaf Sentence** (2008), two stories with similar narrative material, interact: life narratives (under the form of the diary, of the electronic journal, and, even to a certain extent, of emails and letters) are seen as central in the constitution and mediation of identity. In telling the story of depression of Laurence Passmore or Desmond Bates (the central characters in **Therapy** (1995) and **Deaf Sentence** (2008) respectively) some *myths* and metaphors seem to prevail: all characters often draw on the narrative journey of the self which rewrites the real experience of depression into a story of trials, *ogres*, or *sorcerers* thus mediating the return of a wiser person. Therefore, the journey that they take up into the geographical space of their true selves eventually determines and sets off the textual discovery of the self: the *writing* act is mediated as the best therapeutic treatment of depression. Throughout the process of writing, both men are equally confronted with their personal *ogres* and *demon*s, and when the *exorcism* sessions are over a new freer *self* will have been brought to the fore. It is the written text which mediates their own experiences and understanding of life: the moment they detach from their physical self their entire perception of life is altered and mediated since they start to fictionalise their own memories, and therefore give *textual* contours to their *selves.*

## 2. Trapped into the Media(Ting) *Compassion Fatigue*

Both **Therapy** (1995) and **Deaf Sentence** (2008) have started with a number of loosely linked ideas, situations and themes mostly arising out of David Lodge's own life experience. The most important of these elements seems to be depression: in **Therapy** the theme of depression mediates (while being mediated itself), brings together, and has two stories with similar narrative material interact, i.e. the life story of Laurence Passmore and the life of Kierkegaard; in **Deaf Sentence** the life story of Desmond Bates suffering from anxiety and depression caused by the loss of hearing backgrounds, on the one hand, glimpses into the life stories of Beethoven and Goya, while, on the other, it gradually sets up the Auschwitz narrative, therein, the novel's particular interest in and mediation of the human condition and existential doubt.

In this day and age, millions and millions of people are progressively besieged under 'bouts of anxiety attacks and depression' (Lodge, 2002, p. 270). From the contours of undisclosed torments to psychiatric, cultural, and epidemiological reports, there is a glocal urge to give an account (ing) of depression, and, judging by the number of 'newspaper reports and magazine articles' on the market, the pandemic of depression seems to be re-projected particularly at the level of the media. (D. Lodge, 2002: 270) Here is an enlightening observation that Laurence Passmore formulates in **Therapy.**

Perhaps it's what they call 'compassion fatigue', the idea that we get so much human suffering thrust in our faces every day from the media that we've become sort of numbed, we've used up all our reserves of pity, anger, outrage, and can only think of the pain in our own knee. (Lodge, 1995, p. 5)

In **Deaf Sentence,** thirteen years later, Desmond Bates observes**:**

I thought about watching the *News at Ten* but the news is so depressing these days – bombings, murders, atrocities, famines, epidemics global warming – that one shrinks from it late at night; let it wait, you feel, till the next day's newspaper and the cooler medium of print. (Lodge, 2008, p. 10)

The extent of this spiritual and psychological disquiet seems to have entailed two different *modes of surviving therapies*: the first one has allowed for 'a corresponding growth of therapies' such as 'psychotherapy in all its various forms, pharmaceutical therapy, and numerous alternative and holistic therapies like acupuncture, aromatherapy, yoga, reflexology, and so on.' (Lodge, 2002, p. 270)

This is best exemplified by Laurence Passmore, the central male character in **Therapy** whose life is suddenly reduced to and gravitates around a medical term used to designate the unexplainable pain in his knee, namely, I.D.K.: 'You've got Internal Derangement of the Knee. That's what the orthopaedic surgeons call it amongst themselves. Internal Derangement of the Knee. I. D.K. I don't know.' (D. Lodge, 1995: 13) Consequently he takes up various therapies in order to heal the internal derangement of his knee 'both cause and effect of his inner bitterness and the core of the narrative itself.'(M. Praisler, 'A New Treatment for the Self in/of Fiction: David Lodge, *Therapy'*, in E. Croitoru, M. Praisler, D. Tuchel (Eds.), 2005, p. 370)

I have a lot of therapy. On Mondays I see Roland for Physiotherapy, on Tuesdays I see Alexandra for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, and on Fridays I have either aromatherapy or acupuncture. On Wednesdays and Thursdays I'm usually in London, but then I see Amy, which is a kind of therapy too I suppose. (Lodge, 1995, pp. 14-15)

Similarly, readers discover that Desmond Bates, the central male character in **Deaf Sentence**, woke up one day, twenty years ago and realised that his life was suddenly doomed to unexpected changes since he was diagnosed with high frequency deafness (H.F.D.). The story is taken up almost twenty years later, when Desmond Bates will have already coped with the anxieties of becoming stone deaf and the bitter awareness of his growing old. Sick and tired of having had his ears poked at to find a cure for this otherwise incurable disease, Desmond has to confine his life to using a hearing *bug* that connects him to the outside wor(l)d.

Deprived of his hearing and unable to really communicate, Desmond Bates represses his feelings of frustration and puts off forgoing psychological counselling: on the one hand, he oscillates between withdrawing in the world of the written word so as to avoid facing awkward social situations, while, on the other, he tries to mask his infirmity when this happens. Yet, feeling that his life is deeper and deeper sucked under by the distressing mediatic universe he is rooted in, Desmond Bates sees himself forced to start taking up lip reading classes – which to a certain extent eventually function like a group psychotherapy session, or like an Anonymous Association of people sharing his distress.

I had my first lip-reading class today. The experience evoked dim memories of my first day at primary school, which I joined halfway through the school year because of illness: there was the same sense of being a new-boy, uncertain and self-

conscious, in a group that was already bonded and familiar with the routine. (Lodge, 2008, p. 139)

However, neither of the two modes of survival provided for each of the two patients seems to work, and so, both Laurence Passmore and Desmond Bates (well read into English literature and familiar with the work of Graham Greene) take up writing journals. [One of the epigraphs to **Therapy** is taken from Graham Greene's autobiographical volume, **Ways of Escape,** 'Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human condition'. (1980, p. 9) Also, another reference to writing as a form of therapy is a passage taken from Kierkegaard's 1847 personal journal and quoted by Laurence Passmore in his own: 'Only when I write do I feel well. Then I forget all of life's vexations, all its sufferings, then I am wrapped in thought and am happy. (Lodge, 1995, p. 217) Likewise, in another novel by D. Lodge, **Thinks …** (2001), both central characters keep a journal – Helen Reed writes in a diary to cure herself from her anxieties while Ralph Messenger records his thoughts rather as a method of scientific investigation than as therapy.]

Throughout such novels like **Therapy** (1995), **Thinks**… (2001), or **Deaf Sentence** (2008) life narratives (under the form of the diary, of the electronic journal, and, even to a certain extent, of emails and letters) are seen as central in the constitution and mediation of identity. Apparently, Laurence Passmore (**Therapy),** Helen Reed and Ralph Messenger (**Thinks** …), or Desmond Bates (**Deaf Sentence**), each constructs and lives a narrative *in writing* and this narrative *is* themselves, their own identities. Moreover, they can only know themselves as *a self* only within the framework of a life narrative: therein, the narrative of the self is a re-telling or plotting (establishing relations, causes and effects) of events that, in fact, appear to happen one after another. [The Lodgian politics of the narrative thread turns the *self* itself into a story which stitches up the wounds resulting from traumatic events (the death of Helen Reed's husband) or simply unexpected changes (Tubby's I.D.K., Desmond's maddening deafness, or even Messenger's surgical procedure to have his liver cyst removed).]

In telling the story of their depression some *myths* and *metaphors* seem to prevail: all characters often draw on the narrative journey of the self which rewrites the real experience of depression into a story of trials, *ogres*, or *sorcerers* thus mediating the return of a wiser person. So, Tubby leaves on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, Helen takes up a six-month-teaching course on creative

writing at Gloucester University, Desmond accepts a visiting-professor job to Poland – an episode which further occasions his visit to Auschwitz. However, the geographical journey only partly determines their self discovery: in reality it is the journey that they take up into the geographical space of their true selves that determines and sets off the textual discovery of the self.

Intertextuality is often as much an unconscious as a conscious element of the creative process and these two novels by David Lodge prove to be intertextual, in their form (both novels rely extensively on the form of the diary as a narrative technique) and, to some extent in their subject matter. **Deaf Sentence** (2008) bears considerable resemblance to **Therapy** (1995) not only in its treatment of existentialist doubts and issues, but also in its form, which is hardly surprising since David Lodge regards his fiction as 'a kind of DNA of the imagination'. According to him, 'there must be a signature in everything you do, a family resemblance.' (M. Gussow, 'Writing of Intelligence: Academic, Artificial and Amorous', July 5/2001)

Therefore, while **Therapy** seemingly provides its readers with perspectives offered by other characters (therein developing further parallel stories), **Deaf Sentence** plays on variations on point of view (manipulated by one character alone). In **Therapy**, Part Two there is a series of five monologues bearing the names of their respective speakers – 'Amy', 'Louise', 'Ollie,', 'Samantha', and 'Sally' which are in fact written by Tubby himself. This is all but a narrative game which discloses its own rules in Part Three: Tubby starts writing the monologues at the suggestion of his psychotherapist as some kind of therapeutic exercise. Up until that moment, readers assume the monologues to be objective perspectives and unbiased reports on Tubby's deranged behaviour as well. In fact, readers have to reassess them and their value as proofs that he is able to own up to his limitations and recklessness, and is therefore on the way to recovery.

In **Deaf Sentence** David Lodge frequently plays on point of view as well as on the stylistic technique that mediates readers' experience when such changes in perspective are generated, as compared to speech where the options are more limited – though my step grandson Daniel, Marcia's child, hasn't learned this yet. He's two years old, two and a half, and has quite a good vocabulary for his age, but he always refers to himself in the third person, present tense. (Lodge, 2008, p. 10)

Thus, Desmond is a charming first-person narrator, who sometimes fades into a third person narrator, apparently to give himself some relief from the narrative

thread; most likely this constant gaming of point of view is intended to avoid monotony and leave space for other parallel stories to unfold as well.

First I did it in the usual journal style, then I rewrote it in the third person, present tense, the kind of exercise I used to give my students in my stylistics seminar. First person into third person, past tense into present tense, or vice versa. What difference does it make to the effect? Is one method more appropriate to the original experience than another, or does any method interpret rather than represent experience? (10)

The political stakes of this Lodgian textual game are so much higher as both central characters in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence** have to succeed in creating convincing and plausible monologues (which eventually happens): Tubby has no problem in deliberately constructing his monologues the way he does simply because, being a professional scriptwriter, he usually fabricates stories and fictional worlds; similarly, **Desmond Bates** is a retired Professor of Linguistics who used to assign exactly such stylistic exercises to his first year students.

At some point during their psychotherapeutic sessions, Tubby's therapist requires him to write a description of himself. It seems as if that description had had *purging powers* on Tubby since the description sounds more like an exercise of private confession than a common description. A scriptwriter by profession, Tubby relies upon actors and pictures to flesh out his lines of dialogue. Writing his journal, writing the dramatic monologues, above all writing his memoir of Maureen, Tubby becomes a more self-conscious and literary writer – what he calls in his homely idiom, a 'book-writer.' In the process he turns negative, subjective experience into something positive and shareable. That is what literature does, and it is the great consolation and reward of being a book-writer. Kierkegaard knew it was so; Tubby Passmore discovers it is so; I have certainly found it so. (Lodge, 2002, p. 282)

Desmond Bates takes up writing his journal in a rather difficult moment of his life when, while he shrinks 'into retirement and succumbs to deafness', his wife, Fred 'blossoms and becomes more successful in business,' thus making Desmond feel more and more like 'a redundant appendage to the family, an unfortunate liability' (Lodge, 2008, p. 76).

When he accompanied her to this or that social event he sometimes felt like a royal consort escorting a female monarch, walking a pace or two behind her with his hands joined behind his back, a vague unfocussed smile on his face. The social

events themselves had become more of an ordeal than a pleasure because of the deterioration of his hearing, and there were times when he thought of refusing to go to them any longer, but when he contemplated the consequences of such a decision the prospect filled him with a kind of terror: more empty hours to fill, sitting alone at home, with a book or the telly. So he clung on grimly to the social-cultural merry-go-round, simulating an interest and enthusiasm he did not really feel. (2008, pp. 33-34)

Initially intended more like a stylistic exercise to keep his mind trained and give him some sense of usefulness while his wife Fred is away with work, Desmond's diary gradually turns into some kind of unconscious subterfuge intended to keep him away from psychotherapeutic sessions that he so much dreads. The mere prospect of him lying down a sofa and opening up to some stranger does not appeal to him by far: he treasures his privacy dearly and he spends most of his time cut off from the outside wor(l)d. This seemingly impersonal mode of writing mediated by means of a third person singular point of view functions like a signalling post intended to make the reader experience exactly the same emotional dismay that Desmond is trying to overcome; likewise, performing a similar function to that of Tubby's monologues in **Therapy**, Desmond's diary is also intended to increase reader's awareness that while offering for a mode of survival, the diary is also a form of fiction with innumerable prospects of *healing* itself.

While he so much hates his deafness for having turned him into a disposable 'appendage' which plays house husband to his newly successful wife, and while he is trapped into the routine of running errands and paying 'duty visits' to his aging father which he makes 'every four weeks or so' (38) Desmond Bates does begin to believe that, as compared to this 'routine' which 'seldom varies', his loss of hearing is a blessing in disguise because (except for the passive-aggressive relationship he seems to have developed with his hearing aid) it is only now that he is in full control of when and where to allow himself to be intruded upon and therefore turned into a mere mediation of the outside world.

The only advantage of being deaf is, as it were, naturally insulated from a lot of irritating and unpleasant environmental noise (which becomes even more irritating and unpleasant when amplified by a hearing aid) and one might as well make the most of it. (2008, p. 40)

As time passes, he learns to live with the *extended new man* who has grown within him to the point that he almost questions his previous way of living.

Could there be a Deaf Instinct, analogous to Freud's Death Instinct? An unconscious longing for torpor, silence and solitude underlying and contradicting the normal human desire for companionship and intercourse? Am I half in love with easeful deaf? (119)

[In **Beyond the Pleasure Principle** (1961), Sigmund Freud articulates his belief in the thought of a repetition-convulsion in the psychic life: the developing fear or the death instinct. Therefore, Desmond is driven by the hell within him, from which rise the impulses which threaten his humanity: his struggles have a tragic quality about them since they do not narrow or simplify the human world for him, but open and complicate it. To a certain extent, this complication leads to a kind of death, or rather pre-death as he likes to call it: it is through writing that he metaphorically commits suicide thus emerging a cured person in the end.]

## 3. Glocalizing Discourse

When he starts sensing that the mediatic world he moves in closes down on him and it can no longer provide him with a feasible mode of survival to outlive the postmodern frenzy brought to the surface by the 'feverish public appetite, relentlessly encouraged by the media, for new styles in fashion, food, home décor, electronic gadgets, everything' (115-116), Desmond Bates becomes more and more drawn into the idea of continuing what was a mere stylistic exercise in the beginning but now it 'seems to be turning into some kind of journal, or notes for an autobiography, or perhaps is just occupational therapy'. (38)

The episode threw me into a what-is-the-world-coming-to mood, a state I am increasingly prone to these days, prompted by phenomena like *Big Brother***,** four-letter words in the **Guardian,** vibrating penis rings on sale in Boots, binge-drinkers puking in the city centre on Saturday nights, and chemotherapy for cats and dogs. […] I don't think I have ever felt so pessimistic about the future of the human race, even at the height of the Cold War, as I do now, because there are so many possible ways civilization could come to a catastrophic end, and quite soon. (106)

Just when he starts comprehending the limitations of the space he gravitates around, as well as the gloominess of a life deprived of *discourse* something, rather someone unexpected enters in his life, allowing thus for another narrative thread to build up on his own life story.

Deafness is also a kind of pre-death, a drawn-out introduction to the long silence into which we will all eventually lapse. […] There are lots of others, stages of auricular decay, like a long staircase leading down into the grave.

*Down among the deaf men, down among the deaf men,*

*Down, down, down, down;*

*Down among the deaf men let him lie!* (19)

One evening, at a gallery reception, Desmond finds himself standing next to an attractive young woman, who starts talking to him. However, because of his deafness and of the noise which 'reached some time ago a level that makes it impossible for him to hear more than the odd word or phrase of those she addresses to him' (3), their discussion changes into 'a conversational hubbub which bounces off the hard surfaces of the ceiling, walls and floor, and swirls around the heads of the guests, causing them to shout even louder to make themselves heard.' (3) Under the circumstances, he nods agreeably, occasionally exclaiming 'I see'. (4)

They have been talking, or rather *she* has been talking, for some ten minutes now, and strive as he may he cannot identify the conversational topic. […] He glances at the woman's face to see if it gives any clue. She fixes him earnestly with her blue eyes, and pauses in her utterance as if expecting a response. 'I see,' he says, adjusting his countenance to express both thoughtful reflection and sympathy, hoping that one or the other will seem appropriate, or at least not grotesquely inappropriate, to whatever she has been saying. It seems to satisfy her, anyway, and she begins speaking again. (4)

Before he knows it, Desmond is entangled in an odd relationship with Alex Loom, the young woman at the gallery who happens to be an American PhD student at Desmond's former university and who, as the story unfolds, becomes more and more unbalanced.

So I came back into the study and checked my email – 'No New Messages'; and then I decided to write an account of my conversation, or rather non-conversation, with the woman at the ARC private view, which in retrospect seemed rather amusing, though stressful at the time. (10)

Subsequently, after missing an appointment he never knew they had, Desmond is taken aback by a phone call from Alex who reproaches him not having showed up at the scheduled arrangement he had apparently agreed to.

The call had disturbed me, for several reasons. It was completely unexpected; and that I had apparently made an appointment to meet this woman, to discuss her research without he slightest awareness of doing so was not only deeply embarrassing but also a depressing index of the extent of my deafness. (23)

Eventually, Bates visits Alex Loom in her own apartment, where she asks him to supervise her work on the stylistics of suicide notes. As some kind of sexual enticement, Alex takes advantage of Bates's lack of attention and she secretly slips a pair of her underwear into one of the inside pockets of his coat. Fortunately for him, he is able to conceal the discovery of the underwear away from Fred, his wife, even if it is only two days after the incident when it happens. When he complains to Alex about her behaviour, she writes him an email and offers to let him punish her by spanking her: 'Dear Desmond, You're right to be angry, it was a despicable thing to do, a stupid, lazy, selfish, moronic thing and I deserve to be punished for it. '(129) However much and deeply distressed by her proposal, he manages to *escape* it by not showing up at the appointment that Alex settles. Nonetheless, his is taken aback by her powerful insight into his unconscious: 'I have never had such a fantasy before. How did this woman intuit that somewhere in my psyche it was lurking, unsuspected, only waiting to be released?'(130)

By this time, Desmond's life seems to have become one huge imbroglio caused just by his hearing problem: although he does not give in to Alex nor encourage an adulterous relationship with her, he is caught in a web of lies that he finds himself unable to escape from. Lying is worse than cheating and yet, instead of releasing himself from this cocoon of lies, he chooses to rather deceive Fred than tell her the truth. Surprisingly enough, Alex seems to read into Desmond's mind and so it is not long before she starts manipulating him and using his own lies as a weapon against him. Forced to reconcile, Desmond continues supervising Alex's work because in between his running errands and his visits to his father, this seems to be the only thing that arouses interest in him. Consequently, both intrigued by her work and scared by the prospects of such a subject matter, Desmond naively and unexpectedly finds himself trapped into an uncomfortable triangle with Alex's faculty adviser, one of his former colleagues.

I find myself checking my email more frequently than usual to see if she has responded and feeling slightly disappointed when I see from my inbox that she hasn't. Her unusual topic seems to have reawakened my appetite for research. (105)

On account that she wants to test people's ability of differentiating between genuine suicide notes and fake suicide notes, Alex asks Desmond to write a *pseuicide note* (a pseudo-suicide note) which he immediately refuses convinced that 'it would be extremely unwise to put such a potentially compromising document into her irresponsible hands'. (151) Nonetheless, afraid that telling her his real reasons might not be too clever of him, he sensibly pretends to have considered the prospects of a suicidal act, a reason good enough for him not to try and write such a note: 'I'm gradually losing my hearing,' I said. 'There's no cure. Eventually I'll be stone deaf. It's very depressing.' (151)

However, in the privacy of his own space, Desmond is challenged by Alex's proposal of writing such a note, which he considers as the utmost stylistic exercise. On account of his loss of hearing, Desmond starts thinking of famous artists whose lives were dramatically affected by deafness. He recurrently thinks of Philip Larkin, Evelyn Waugh, Beethoven or Goya and is particularly taken into by the study of Beethoven's biography: one day he comes across the *Heiligestadt Testament* so Desmond copies it and saves it in an electronic file on his computer.

Six years after he began to go deaf, when he had given up hope for a cure, Beethoven wrote a letter, addressed to his two brothers, but read after his death, explaining the 'secret cause' of his off-putting temperament and manner. It's known as the Heiligestadt Testament, because he wrote it in a little village of that name outside Vienna to which he had withdrawn for six months of solitary rest on the advice of his doctor. I copied it from Thayer, and have it on the file. (81))

Therefore, deeply stirred by Alex's proposal, he tries his hand at writing such a *pseuicide* note that would be his very own Heiligestadt Testament as he could say that the Heiligestadt Testament was *instead* of a suicide note, designed to be found after he died by natural causes, but having just the same motives as a suicide note: to reveal the depth of his despair to his family and friends, to explain why he seemed outwardly such a grouchy unsociable bastard, and make them feel bad for not realizing how wretched he had been. Maybe that's why I started writing this journal; maybe that's what it is, a testament. The Rectory Road Testament. (153)

Nonetheless, this stylistic exercise brings to the surface distressing memories of his former wife Maisie whom he assisted in committing suicide: dying of cancer, she was helpless and powerless in fighting the disease any longer -fighting it would have only prolonged excruciating moments and postponed the unavoidable only for a short time – so, with the help of Maisie's doctor, Desmond gives her a lethal

overdose of painkillers with alcohol. Overwhelmed by guilt and regret– the guilt of having sent his children away for the Christmas holiday, thus depriving them of their last moments with their mother while she was still alive, and the regret of his being powerless to ease her pain – Desmond abandons what should have been a mere stylistic exercise.

Imagining what had brought me to the point of preferring extinction to the continuation of consciousness was easier, for I had already thought of it in a conversation with Alex: a drastic acceleration of hearing loss, leading to almost total deafness. Everything that I suffered now – frustration, humiliation, isolation – multiplied exponentially. A damper on every party, a dud at every dinner table. A grandfather unable to communicate with his growing grandchildren, in the presence of whose blank looks and idiotic misunderstandings they must strive to stifle their giggles. […] But as I drafted the note insincerity showed in every word, even in punctuation marks (did anyone ever use a semi-colon in a suicide note?) […] I could have written a convincing note based on the premise of a painful terminal illness, but just thinking of it stirred up distressing memories of Maisie. I abandoned the exercise. (152)

Obviously, this also turns into an exercise for the reader who has full and unlimited access to Desmond's true *self*, the textual contours of which have already started to get shape. Desmond seems to hate everything around this time of the year: he hates Christmas just as he hates the thought of Christmas which almost turns him into Grinch, the man who stole Christmas.

Christmas, how I hate it. Not only it, but the thought of it, which is forced into one's consciousness earlier and earlier every year. […] Now the papers and their glossy magazine supplements are so full of ideas for presents, parties, punch and leering advice to men about buying lingerie for their womenfolk, than you can hardly find anything worth reading. (146)

However, if truth be told, it is not the consumerist aspect of the holidays which he so much hates, but rather the painful memories of Maisie's death which he tries to repress throughout the year but which will unavoidably come to life around Christmas time: if he drinks more by the day and inevitably turns into a grouchy old man, increasingly difficult to cope with, it is because of his memories which he shut into his unconscious rather than of his deafness, which is only a mere pretext. They are his *ogres* and his diary is his *exorcist.*

Both in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence** readers are allowed to peep into a collage of intertextual worlds made up of intratextual words: obsessed with his unfinished education, Tubby compulsively looks things up in dictionaries:

Ow! Ouch! Yaroo! Sudden stab of pain in the knee, for no discernible reason. Sally said the other day that it was my thorn in the flesh. I wondered where the phrase came from and went to look it up. (I do a lot of looking up – it's how I compensate for my lousy education. My study is full of reference books, but I buy them compulsively.) (Lodge, 1995, p. 33)

I just looked up Existentialism in a paperback dictionary of modern thought. […] 'Existentialism was inaugurated by Kierkegaard in a violent reaction against the all-encompassing absolute Idealism of Hegel.' Oh, it was, was it? I looked up Kierkegaard.

'*Kierkegaard, Soren. Danis philosopher, 1813-55. See under EXISTENTIALISM.'* (1995, p. 64)

Likewise, Desmond Bates also seems to have caught the habit of looking things up either in dictionaries or on the Internet, and so, readers can learn about the definition of 'loom' intended to mediate their understanding of the significance of Alex Loom's name; also, they read entire paragraphs of poetry or prose which Desmond seemingly quotes from memory: there are constant references to the Bible, J. Milton, Ph. Larkin, E. Waugh, J. Austen, G. Greene to mention just a few; they peep into the remains of letters written by Holocaust victims, or they even read a *Suicide Guide* which eventually turns out to have been a sick joke played by Alex on Professor Bates (clearly, this episode is intended to raise awareness to the status of fiction and fictionality).

Alex Loom! What an intriguing person, but a bit of an enigma. Even her name is a puzzle. […] Out of idle curiosity I looked up the noun *loom* in the OED and it has had an extraordinary variety of meanings […]. The word has fewer meanings as a verb: to appear indistinctly, to come into view in an enlarged and indefinite form, freq. threateningly; of a ship or the sea, to move slowly up and down. (Lodge, 2008, p. 93)

*The first thing you must decide is what method to use. Are you going to type your note on a typewriter or a computer? A handwritten note is more personal, and will therefore have a greater emotional effect on your readers. […]* (2008, p. 113)

Alex evidently thought the document was a joke, something to 'amuse' myself with, and I have to admit that I laughed aloud in places, but in a slightly guilty way, appalled that humour could be wrung from such a subject. (115)

The literary discourse of the two novels is complex, outlining the literature of the past and the textuality of the present and so, '[the] discursive variety and complexity is one of the reasons why [the novels] imitates the social world with a verisimilitude unequalled by other literary forms. (Lodge, 1997, p. 182) The huge octopus of contemporary multiplicity spreads its tentacles and sets them deeply into the two novels under the form of: journal (both Desmond Bates and Laurence Passmore write into their journals), autobiography (D. Lodge has relied on his own life experience to describe Desmond coping with his hearing impairment problem; similarly, he has experienced with all forms of writing fiction, including scriptwriting), drama (especially in **Therapy**), poetry and realist prose (there are numerous intertextual references in both novels), experimental writing (Tubby's monologues seemingly created by other speakers, Desmond's stylistic exercises, and even Alex's writing of the *Suicide Guide*), metafiction (the journal is used as a metafictional device for fiction which questions and probes its own self-reflexive nature), dictionary entries (both in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence**), passages of telephone conversation (particularly in **Deaf Sentence**), proverbs (both in **Therapy** and **Deaf Sentence**), abbreviations and acronyms (mainly in **Therapy**), medical texts (both in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence**), journalistic texts (both in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence),** biblical texts and religious writings (both in **Therapy** and in **Deaf Sentence**), excerpts in Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, Danish, German (particularly in **Therapy**).

Seemingly attempting to counteract the death of fiction, the novel[s] nonetheless bring[s] forth all its illnesses and deformities in its movement away from the stable, commonsensical content and form. Added is, on the one hand, the linguistic game defining the absurd (non)communication or primitive semiotics of contemporary cultural globalization and, on the other hand, the role and impact of the media leading to uniformisation, dehumanization and subtle manipulation. (Praisler, 2005, p. 372)

The account of Desmond's flashbacking self, or the story of his demented father (an image he does not enjoy since it proleptically mirrors himself), the description of his marriage with Fred that he tries to reconcile, or even the Auschwitz episode, all these narrative threads are framed into Desmond's own chronicle of his deafness which David Lodge propels into the comic.

'Deafness is comic, as blindness is tragic,' (Lodge, 2008, p. 13) or 'Deafness is always comic' (2008, p. 181) are two of the epigrammatic statements that Bates usually makes and to which he is undoubtedly entitled, after having relentlessly slipped into H.F.D. for almost twenty years now: his life has turned into one long conversational pratfall, in which the simplest statement can entail a low farce played on the former academic he used to be and the present 'deafie' who gives 'people a few laughs ' (177) at his expense.

Since 'deafies have no such compassion-inducing signs' as the blind have – their 'hearing aids are almost invisible' and they 'have no lovable animals dedicated to looking after' them (13-14) – Bates mockingly asks himself 'what would be the equivalent of a guide dog for a deaf?' to which he gives the hilarious solution of 'a parrot' placed on the 'shoulder squawking into' the deafies' ears. (13-14) Such self-mocking instantiations achieved through the use of the ironical tone are not isolated in Bates's discourse since he deliberately constructs them so as to be able to counteract his own misery and survive the ridicule of sighted people who regard the blind 'with compassion, go out of their way to help them, guide them across busy roads, warn them of obstacles, stroke their guide dogs,' (13-14) but who would gladly grab at the chance of having a few laughs at the expense of a deafie.

'*My mother's deafness is very trifling you see – just nothing at all. By only raising my voice, and saying anything two or three times over, she is sure to hear; but then she is used to my voice,'* says Miss Bates in **Emma.** How subtly Jane Austen hints at the politely disguised frustration and irritation of the company at having to bear the repetition of every banal remark in louder tones for the benefit of old Mrs Bates. I must be in a worse state than my fictional namesake, because I'm used to Fred's voice, but I still can't hear what she is saying without a hearing aid. (79)

In a seemingly analogous fashion, in **Therapy** Tubby's discourse is marked by self-mockery which he uses to neutralise his own depression and compulsion with introspection, counting the latest one of regularly seeing a psychiatrist (Dr. Marples): 'I call her Marbles for a joke. If she even moves or retires, I'll be able to say I've lost my marbles.' (Lodge, 1995, p. 14)

In **Deaf Sentence** humour does not reside only in the comic of language (throughout the novel there are puns pertaining to Bates's condition, for which he shows a particular weakness) but also in the comic of situation which, if it doesn't show Bates caught in imbroglios caused by his hearing impairment, it casts a hilarious light on him (he treats seemingly trivial matters with an outmost

seriousness). A good example is the episode when Bates learns that Alex has defaced a library book with a turquoise highlighter, when his spluttering outrage is inadvertently hilarious.

To me the treatment of books is a test of civilized behaviour. I admit to making light pencil marks in the margins of a library book occasionally, but I erase them scrupulously as I go through the pages writing up my notes. It enrages me to encounter passages in library books that have been heavily underlined, usually with the aid of a ruler, by a previous borrower evidently under the delusion that this procedure will somehow engrave the words on his or her cerebral cortex, and the offence is of course vastly increased if the writing instrument is a ballpen rather than a pencil. (Lodge, 2008, p. 106)

Furthermore, just when the conflict between Professor Bates and Alex is starting to worsen, David Lodge manipulates the narrative thread so as to never permit it to boil over: in fact, he unexpectedly banishes Alex out from the story, turning his attention instead to Bates's attempts of saving his marriage with Fred. As a result, just as Christmas is nearly over and the New Year is ready to set in, Desmond and Fred, Jakki, Fred's associate, and her boyfriend, all take a trip to Gladeworld, a very popular resort centre which Desmond sees as a most appalling holiday camp, more like a concentration camp because of the high walls which surround the resort.

This episode is entitled 'Deaf in the afternoon' and it powerfully connotes with Hemingway's **Death in the Afternoon** so that, what is apparently overloaded with comic potential eventually turns up to be somewhat more disheartening than hilarious: just like in a bullfight where there is always someone having fun at the expense of the bull tortured and killed on the arena by the matador, Desmond's ego is ultimately knelt down by his tormenting deafness. Desmond and Fred have barely spoken to each other since Christmas time when he and his father have gone drunk, made terrible fools of themselves and even humiliated Fred's guests, and so, under the pressure of a marriage which becomes more and more estranged, and with the worries of a headstrong, increasingly senile father whose health condition is worsening, Bates starts drinking heavily which causes him to behave in a rather reckless way: after having spent some time in the sauna, the two quite intoxicated men, Desmond and Jakki's boyfriend, finally get out ready to take the ultimate test of manhood: pouring a bucket of cold water over their heads. Unfortunately for Bates, some ear wax melts as he is exposed to the high heat in the sauna, and so,

when he pours the bucket of cold water over his head the wax in his ears coagulates instantly, thus turning into a wax plug which completely blocks out all sounds.

A terrible dread gripped him. He was deaf. Really deaf. Profoundly deaf. The trauma of the mass of cold water suddenly drenching his overheated head must have had some catastrophic effect on the hair cells, or on the part of the cortex that was connected to them, cutting off all communication. He had a mental image of some part of his brain going dark, like a chamber or tunnel where suddenly all the lights go out, for ever. (2008, p. 226)

The novel slides even deeper into sombreness when Bates, eager 'to get away from the dull routine of a house-husband, the worrying problems of a mildly demented father, and the dangerous attentions of an importunate, unscrupulous postgraduate groupie' (235) embarks on a trip to Poland, where he is invited to deliver some lectures as a visiting Professor and where he is sure to be 'once again respected, deferred to, entertained and looked after, with the decorum appropriate to a visiting scholar'. (235) In the last day of his stay there, under the drive of an impulse, Desmond visits Auschwitz and the former Nazi concentration camps, episode which brings to the fore the disturbing revelation about his first wife, Maisie.

The events of the last couple of months keep provoking echoes and cross-references like that: the votive candle flickering in the dark on the rubble of the Auschwitz crematorium and the night-light I put on Maisie's bedside table when she fell asleep for ever; hospital pyjamas and striped prison uniforms; the sight of Dad's wasted naked body on the hospital mattress when I helped to wash him, and grainy photographs of naked corpses heaped in the death campus. It's been something of an education, the experience of these last few weeks. (289)

Upon his return he learns that Anne, his daughter to Maisie, has finally given birth to a baby boy, but he also finds the disturbing news of his father's worsening condition: it is as if the 'the baby in Anne's arms' represented 'the beginning of the human life-cycle at an event focused on its end'. (281) There is a bloody battle inside of him and he experiences conflicting feelings which he does not know how to reconcile: 'I didn't know quite how to balance this private joy against the experience of Auschwitz, one new life against a million deaths.'(257).

As Wittgenstein said, 'Death is not an event *in* life.' You cannot experience it, you can only behold it happening to others, with various degrees of pity and fear, knowing that one day it will happen to you. (289)

Clearly, with his visit to Auschwitz his *exorcism* is brought to a closure so that he is now free to reassess his whole life and his marriage to Fred.

Chaim Hermann described Auschwitz as '*simply hell, but Dante's hell is incomparably ridiculous in comparison with this real one here, and we eye-witnesses, and we cannot leave it alive'*. […] He himself had no way of knowing whether his wife would receive his letter, but in the midst of all this diabolical evil he asked her forgiveness for not sufficiently appreciating their life together, and this was the sentence in his letter that most affected me: '*If there have been, at various times, trifling misunderstandings in our life, now I see how one was unable to value the passing time.'* (265)

The end of the novel portrays a more submissive Desmond, one who has already been confronted to his own *demons* and surfaced a new man able to enjoy life to the full despite his physical inabilities.

'Deafness is comic, blindness is tragic,' I wrote earlier in this journal, and I have played variations on the phonetic near equivalence of 'deaf' and 'death,' but now it seems more meaningful to say that deafness is comic and death is tragic, because final, inevitable, and inscrutable. (289)

Desmond's search for contentment and meaning, or his growing older and wiser are unquestionably both mediated and mimicked by the text itself:

You could say that birth itself is a sentence of death – I expect some glib philosopher *has* said it somewhere – but it is a perverse and useless thought. Better to dwell on life, and try to value the passing time. (290)

## 4. First Things Last …

In keeping with the Lodgian politics of his previous fiction, David Lodge uses Desmond's journal as a pre-text to introduce numerous meanders around traditional modes of writing and incursions into the discourse of the world today: the text is permeated with metafictional asides about famous deaf artists (e.g. Goya, Beethoven), medical texts explaining causes of deafness as well as numerous intertextual literary allusions to deafness. Similarly, while mediating the textual journey of the discovery of the self, the entire text touches upon a clear-cut message, the authorial intention being easily observable in this respect: Bates's diary questions and probes its own status as fiction:

'It occurs to me that if this were a novel anyone reading it would probably think: 'Ah-hah, poor old Desmond obviously hasn't realized that Winnifred has a lover, and all the sliming and cosmetic surgery was for *his* benefit, and that with the connivance of Jakki she regularly slips away from the shop for afternoons of adultery, while keeping the old man happy at home with an occasion al blow-job.' But I'm quite sure that isn't the case. Putting aside my intuitive trust in her fidelity, the beautifying process more or less coincided with Fred's return to religious observance, a development I deplore on intellectual grounds but which I feel is some kind of guarantee that I am not being cuckolded. (73)

Pertaining to the resemblance relationship that **Deaf Sentence** and **Therapy** bear to one another**,** both novels disclose the *writing* act as the best therapeutic treatment of depression. Consequently, in spite of the novels' elaborated structure, there are as many as three basic levels which can be told apart by the reader.

They all unfold in the same direction, although their juxtaposition and, at times, conflicting interaction divert the reader's attention to the technicalities of novel writing, of the structure and texture of the text. The three selves presupposed by each and the transformations they are subject to due to the external pressure exercised by the other two respectively make up the dominant emphasis of the book[s] – a memorable end whose means are overshadowed, a necessary ingredient for popular success.(Praisler, 2005, p. 370)

Both Desmond Bates and Laurence Passmore write for different reasons. As it has already been pointed, Desmond starts keeping his journal as a stylistic exercise intended to throw him out of the 'rut-irement' (Lodge, 2008, p. 238) he has fallen into lately. As time passes, he fancies that his journal might eventually turn into an autobiography worth publishing. Nonetheless, despite the reasons which have led to its beginnings, Desmond's journal is kept as some sort of occupational therapy, and eventually psychotherapeutic therapy.

Not entirely differing with Desmond Bates, Laurence Passmore writes for two reasons: on the one hand, he writes for money since the job of a scriptwriter is apparently better paid than that of a writer, and, on the other, he writes for personal satisfaction so that the journal gradually starts performing the same function as that of his psychotherapeutic sessions. In the beginning of his diary Tubby complains about his state which is actually rooted in the social context he is much part of:

I have depression, anxiety, panic attacks, night sweats, insomnia, but not nightmares. I never did dream much. Which simply means, I understand, that I

don't remember my dreams because we dream all the time we're asleep, so they say. It's as if there's an unwatched telly flickering all night long inside my head. The Dream Channel. I wish I could make a video recording of it. Maybe I would get a clue then to what's the matter with me. I don't mean my knee. I mean my head. My mind. My soul. […] (Lodge, 1995, pp. 4-5)

Soon after the beginning of the novel, both the professional and the private life of Laurence Passmore go into crisis. 'As the illness gradually contaminates his way of life and reactions to the world around' (Praisler, 2005, p. 370), the writing *signature* of his scripts also changes so that his producers threaten to hire someone else to write the scripts. Then Tubby's wife confounds him even more when she threatens to divorce him because she cannot stand living with him any longer. These double blows push Tubby from a state of low-pulsed, non-specific anxiety and depression into something like a full-blown nervous breakdown. One symptom of his derangement is a series of absurd and unsuccessful attempts to make up for a lifetime's marital fidelity by getting into bed with any woman who has shown the slightest interest in him in the past. (Lodge, 2002, p. 272)

Tubby's compulsive behaviour after his wife leaves him is, in fact, mediated through the eyes and thoughts of other characters, who relate their stories in the form of dramatic monologues, addressing interlocutors whose responses are implied, not quoted. Tubby's friend, Amy, depicts to her psychoanalyst his failed attempt to turn their nonphysical relationship into a carnal one, with ludicrously catastrophic results. Then Louise, a Hollywood producer, presumably has a telephone conversation with a friend whom she tells how Tubby, whom she had met four years previously and strove to seduce, unexpectedly reappeared in Los Angeles to invite her out to dinner. His conduct puzzles Louise until, when they are in the middle of their meal, Tubby is seeking a kind of unattainable, inauthentic Repetition like Constantine Constantius in Kierkegaard's novella of that name, who finds that 'the only thing repeated was he impossibility of repetition' (*Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, 1942, p. 70). When Louise explains that she is involved in a relationship and is pregnant, Tubby is distraught and quotes Kierkegaard to her: 'The most dreadful thing that can happen to a man is to become ridiculous in his own eyes in a matter of essential importance.' (Lodge, 1995, p. 168) In another monologue, the producer of Tubby's sitcom, Ollie Silvers, explains to a drinking companion how the troubled and deranged Tubby proposed in all seriousness to write a television mini-series based on the life of Kierkegaard. Samantha, a striving young script editor, relates how Tubby invited

her to attend him to Copenhagen, allegedly to do research for his Kierkegaard film project, but really, she assumed, to have a sexual fling with her. This was indeed Tubby's intention, but he is so affected by the poignancy of the relics in the Kierkegaard Room at the Bymuseum, and by the pathos of Kierkegaard's modest grave in the Assistents cemetery, that he is unable to exploit Samantha's impatience to be seduced. As Tubby himself puts it later, in his journal:

Something held me back, and it wasn't the fear of impotence, or of aggravating my knee injury. Call it conscience. Call it Kierkegaard. They have become one and the same thing. I think Kierkegaard is the thin man inside me who has been struggling to get out, and in Copenhagen he finally did. (1995, p. 209)

Throughout the process of writing, both men are equally confronted with their personal *ogres* and *demon*s, and when the *exorcism* sessions are over a new freer *self* will have been brought to the fore. It is the written text which mediates their own experiences and understanding of life: the moment they detach from their physical self their entire perception of life is altered and mediated since they start to fictionalise their own memories, and therefore give *textual* contours to their *selves.*

Thus, if at the beginning of his journal Desmond is pondering on whether 'deafness is comic' and 'blindness is tragic' (Lodge, 2008, p. 13), by the end he will have learnt that 'deafness is comic and death is tragic, because final, inevitable, and inscrutable' (2008, p. 289) and he should learn to enjoy life to the full. Similarly, in his journal Tubby becomes aware that in order to overcome his guilt for manipulating audiences (he is a scriptwriter who mediates worlds according to certain consumerist strategies) he has to block out any impositions that would otherwise be forced on him.

I've come to the conclusion that the essential difference between book-writing and script-writing isn't that the late is mostly dialogue – it's a question of tense. A script in the present tense. Not literally, but ontologically. […] Whereas, when you write something in a book, it all belongs to the past; even if you write, 'I am writing, I am writing,' over and over again, the act of writing is finished with, out of sight, by the time somebody reads the result. A journal is halfway between the two forms. It's like talking silently to yourself. It's a mixture of monologue and autobiography. (Lodge, 1995, pp. 285-286)

It is in the much cherished intimacy of their journal that both Desmond and Tubby are at home. It is in this closed, private space that they are true to themselves,

sometimes reckless, and sometimes unrestrained. They bring to the fore issues buried deep and locked inside the unconscious parts of their beings, they commit introspection and, more importantly, they pass on where-has-the-entire-world-gone-to judgments.

Both **Deaf Sentence** and **Therapy** are placed at the side-line between fiction and fact as they constantly raise awareness of their status of text in the making:

Shifting the emphasis from the narrated character to the narrating persona, it [the novel] keeps the two bound together by common preoccupations with texting-the-world/ the-world-as-text. Writing, rewriting and unwriting the self becomes the main goal of the fiction that unfolds before the reader's eyes – one of the metamorphoses constantly, allowing glimpses into numerous, canonical by now, literary genres, practices and techniques. (Praisler, 2005, p. 372)

Bringing matters to a conclusion, due mention needs to be made to the fact that, all throughout their journals (which mediate a response to the contemporary psychoanalytical drive), both Laurence Passmore in **Therapy** and Desmond Bates in **Deaf Sentence** cunningly mediate what seems to be a recurrent contemporary tendency of resorting to Freud's theories in literary themes.

The peculiar verisimilitude of the novel's representation of reality, and the peculiarly hypnotic spell the novel casts upon its readers have always made it an object of some suspicion, both morally and aesthetically. Is here not something fundamentally unnatural and unhealthy about a form of art which suspends the reader's awareness of his own existence in real space and time? Is not the pleasure of the novelistic text akin to day-dreaming, wish-fulfilment fantasy? Freud certainly thought so. (Lodge, 1997, p. 183)

Thus, apart from touching upon existential doubts and issues, both **Deaf Sentence** and **Therapy** seem to suggest and offer a mode of survival in the world of the word where the poetics of the text has been gradually traded for by the politics of the fictional game.

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